



Chief Development Officer

Leadership Profile

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Executive Summary

Rodale Institute, a globally recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit and a leading voice in regenerative organic agriculture, seeks a strategic, visionary, and experienced fundraising executive to serve as its next Chief Development Officer (CDO). This individual will join a mission-driven leadership team at a pivotal moment in the organization's growth, helping to scale its philanthropic enterprise and expand its global impact.

For more than 75 years, Rodale Institute has advanced the science and practice of regenerative organic agriculture through rigorous research, farmer training, and education. What began as a pioneering effort to explore the connection between soil health and human health has grown into an internationally respected organization influencing farming practices, policy, and food systems worldwide. Today, Rodale Institute supports farmers transitioning millions of acres to regenerative organic practices, partners with corporations and government agencies, and leads one of the longest-running comparative farming systems trials in the United States.

Philanthropy plays a central and increasingly important role in supporting this work. As the Institute expands its national and global footprint, there is a need to build a more scalable, sophisticated, and data-informed development function. The organization is currently advancing a \$140 million comprehensive campaign to support research, farmer training, infrastructure, and programmatic growth over the next several years.

Reporting to the Chief Executive Officer and serving on the Executive Leadership Team, the Chief Development Officer will lead all fundraising and external development activities. This includes overseeing major and principal gifts, institutional and corporate partnerships, planned giving, digital fundraising, and development operations. The CDO will also serve as a visible external ambassador, personally engaging in cultivating and soliciting high-capacity donors and strategic partners.

The ideal candidate will be an accomplished development leader with a track record of building and scaling fundraising programs within complex, mission-driven organizations. They will bring the ability to recruit, develop, and lead a high-performing development team, recognizing that strong people and clear structure are essential to sustained fundraising success. The CDO will inspire generosity, cultivate meaningful relationships, and translate a highly scientific and mission-focused body of work into compelling opportunities for philanthropic investment. A deep commitment to advancing regenerative organic agriculture and a passion for mission-driven impact are essential.

This is an exceptional opportunity for a development executive to join a respected, growing organization at a defining moment, helping to build the resources, partnerships, and visibility needed to advance a global movement focused on the health of people and the planet.

To express personal interest in this role or to submit a nomination, please refer to the Procedure for Candidacy at the end of this profile.

Rodale Institute | Organizational Overview

Rodale Institute is a global leader in regenerative organic agriculture with a legacy spanning more than 75 years. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, they are dedicated to advancing the regenerative organic movement through rigorous scientific research, comprehensive farmer training, and broad consumer education. Their long-standing commitment to natural farming systems has helped demonstrate that organic agriculture is a viable and essential approach to ensuring long-term human and environmental health.

History

The origins of Rodale Institute trace back to 1947, when J. I. Rodale established what was then known as the Soil and Health Foundation. Inspired by a belief that healthy soil creates healthy food and healthy people, he purchased a struggling farm in Pennsylvania to test farming methods grounded in natural soil restoration. His pioneering views on organic agriculture helped shape the early organic movement in the United States. After his passing in 1971, his son Robert Rodale expanded the organization's work by developing a research-focused farm in Kutztown, Pennsylvania. Over time, this site became the Institute's home and an active center for regenerative organic research and education. The farmland continues to serve as a living laboratory where soil health practices, organic crop production, and sustainable farming strategies are tested and refined.



Through decades of continued development, Rodale Institute has become recognized as a foundational force in shaping the modern understanding of organic agriculture. Their commitment to long-term research and farmer outreach has established them as a trusted resource for farms, policymakers, and communities seeking to adopt natural and regenerative approaches to growing food.



Mission

Rodale Institute confronts one of the world's greatest challenges: creating a resilient global food system that improves human health and the environment. Their mission is to advance groundbreaking research and best-in-class education that enables farms and farmers to transition to regenerative organic agricultural practices, thereby improving the health of the world's soil and securing the global food supply.

Vision

Rodale Institute envisions a changed world where agricultural products are produced in a regenerative organic manner, and the metrics of success are measured against the health of people and the planet.

Core Programs and Areas of Impact

Rodale Institute's work spans research, farmer training, consumer education, and certification leadership. The following integrated quantitative data strengthens the understanding of their impact.

Scientific Research

Since 1947, Rodale Institute has led scientific exploration into natural and responsible farming approaches grounded in soil biology. Their campus is home to the Farming Systems Trial, the longest-running research project comparing organic and conventional farming practices in the United States. This landmark study demonstrates that organic systems produce competitive yields after the transition period, perform better during drought, support greater farm profitability, improve soil health, and reduce energy use and carbon emissions. Their research also advances solutions for pest and disease management, natural weed control, nutrient-rich food production, and strategies that help farms adapt to extreme weather conditions.

Findings from this research continue to show the advantages of regenerative organic systems. Results from the Farming Systems Trial reveal that organic regenerative systems can yield up to forty percent more than conventional systems during drought years. Additional research shows that organic systems use 45% less energy and emit 40% fewer carbon emissions while increasing soil carbon and enhancing overall soil resilience. These scientific outcomes demonstrate the power of regenerative organic agriculture to address climate change, improve water retention, and support long-term farm viability.

Farmer Training and Workforce Development

Rodale Institute addresses critical national gaps in the agricultural workforce. Only 1% of farmland in the United States is currently certified organic, yet 95 million acres of farmland are expected to change ownership within the next decade. Their farmer training programs are designed to prepare the next generation of regenerative organic growers for this major transition.

The organization offers immersive programs, including the Farmer Training School, Veteran Farmer Training, university partnerships, and internships across multiple departments. These programs cover essential competencies in soil science, crop production, marketing, financial management, and ecological stewardship.

Consumer Education

Rodale Institute provides one of the most comprehensive resource libraries for regenerative organic agriculture. Their platform includes downloadable field guides, white papers, guidance on organic farm funding, and school gardening curriculum resources.

They also offer extensive regional farmer toolkits covering major areas across the United States, including the Midwest, West, Plains, Northeast,

Northwest, Southeast, Southwest, and Mid-Atlantic regions. These resources help farmers strengthen supply chains, improve long-term viability, and transition to organic markets.

In addition, Rodale Institute's virtual learning center provides free online courses in organic certification, livestock transition, regenerative health, and consumer education, expanding access to high-quality organic learning worldwide.

Leadership in Regenerative Organic Certified®

One way you'll see Rodale Institute in the consumer marketplace is through the new **Regenerative Organic Certification**, a new high-bar food and fiber label that includes soil health, animal welfare, and worker fairness. <https://rodaleinstitute.org/education/resources/>

Rodale Institute helped shape and continues to support Regenerative Organic Certified®, a holistic agricultural standard that elevates soil health, animal welfare, and social fairness. The certification builds on the USDA Organic standard and adds additional criteria that set a higher bar for ecological and social responsibility.



This rapid growth reflects an increasing commitment to transparency and integrity in regenerative organic farming systems, with Rodale Institute continuing to guide and support this global movement.

What Is Regenerative Organic Agriculture?

Regenerative organic agriculture is a farming system that goes beyond sustainability. It is a holistic approach that works with natural systems to improve the resources it depends on rather than simply maintaining them. This philosophy recognizes soil as a living foundation for ecological and human health and seeks to enhance its capacity over time.

Why “Regenerative”?

In the nineteen seventies, Bob Rodale, son of founder J. I. Rodale, recognized that the term “sustainable” did not fully capture the potential of organic agriculture. Sustainability implies maintaining current conditions, but that is insufficient given the widespread degradation of soil health caused by industrial farming practices. Bob Rodale understood that farming should foster continual improvement, making soil and land better with each growing cycle. This belief led him to coin the term “regenerative organic,” which he defined as a system focused on renewal, resilience, and long-term vitality.

Why It Matters

The current industrial model of agriculture poses significant risks to global food security and environmental stability. According to the United Nations, only sixty years of farmable topsoil remain if prevailing practices continue. Despite this urgent threat, only one percent of U.S. cropland is certified organic. This reality makes Rodale Institute’s work especially critical. The food system requires

transformational change to protect people's health, restore soil health, and secure a sustainable future before essential resources are depleted

The Three Pillars of Regenerative Organic Certified®

Soil Health

Regenerative organic agriculture uses practices such as cover crops, crop rotation, and conservation tillage to build soil organic matter, promote biodiversity, and avoid synthetic inputs. ROC® also excludes soil-less systems.

Animal Welfare

The certification protects the Five Freedoms for animals and requires grass-fed and pasture-raised conditions, prohibits CAFOs and long-distance transport, and ensures access to suitable shelter.

Social Fairness

ROC® ensures fair payments and living wages for farmers and farmworkers, safe working conditions, capacity-building, and freedom of association.



Position Summary

The Chief Development Officer (CDO) is a key member of the Executive Leadership Team and provides vision, strategic direction, and operational oversight for all fundraising and external development initiatives. Reporting to the Chief Executive Officer, the CDO will drive annual and long-term contributed revenue, expand brand visibility, and cultivate a deeply engaged, mission-aligned global community of supporters.

The CDO oversees all aspects of fundraising, including major and principal gifts, institutional giving, corporate partnerships, planned giving, digital fundraising, community engagement, and development operations. This executive will also lead Rodale Institute's **multi-year comprehensive capital campaign**, which will fuel transformational growth in science, farmer transition programs, facilities, and global impact.

This leader will serve as a strategic partner to the CEO, Board of Directors, and cross-functional colleagues—ensuring philanthropic strategy aligns with the Institute's mission, values, and programmatic priorities. A sophisticated relationship builder and compelling storyteller, the CDO will represent Rodale Institute externally with authenticity, credibility, and purpose.

Reporting Relationships

Reporting to the Chief Executive Officer, direct reports include the Senior Development Manager and Development Strategist, with the opportunity to assess, build, and grow the development team over time.



Responsibilities

Strategic Leadership & Revenue Growth

- Develop and execute a comprehensive, multiyear development strategy that expands annual and long-term revenue, including major gifts, institutional funding, corporate partnerships, planned giving, and digital engagement.
- Lead Rodale Institute's \$72.5M comprehensive campaign, guiding case development, fundraising priorities, volunteer structures, donor pipelines, and campaign reporting.
- Evaluate fundraising operations and implement clear goals, KPIs, and staffing structures to exponentially grow the donor base and donor lifetime value.
- Build data-informed strategies across donor acquisition, retention, upgrade pathways, forecasting, and segmentation.

Board Partnership & Governance Leadership

- Partner closely with the Board of Directors and the Development Committee to advance the fundraising strategy, equip members for donor engagement, and identify potential new board candidates.
- Provide regular fundraising reports, forecasts, and insights to the Board and executive leadership.

Donor Engagement, Portfolio Management & Stewardship

- Build, manage, and steward a portfolio of major donors, foundations, corporations, and institutional partners who invest significantly in Rodale Institute's mission.
- Serve as a key external ambassador, representing the Institute at events, donor meetings, industry convenings, and thought-leadership opportunities.
- Oversee a comprehensive donor experience framework that strengthens cultivation, stewardship, and long-term relationships across all donor segments.
- Partner with the CEO and Board members in high-level cultivation and solicitation strategies.

Brand Visibility, Marketing Integration & External Affairs

- In partnership with the Director of Marketing, lead strategies to grow brand awareness, expand national visibility, and build a critical mass of engaged supporters.
- Ensure communications, digital engagement, and storytelling effectively reach target audiences and drive donor growth, corporate partnership activation, and consumer reach.
- Serve as a visible spokesperson and representative for the organization, strengthening Rodale Institute's position as a leader in regenerative organic agriculture.

Development Operations, Budget Management & Compliance

- Oversee annual development budgets and optimize resources to support both operational and long-term sustainability.
- Strengthen development systems, processes, CRM accuracy, analytics, reporting, and data governance.
- Ensure compliance with ethical fundraising standards, gift acceptance policies, and agreements related to restricted and institutional funding.

Team Leadership & Talent Development

- Lead, mentor, and develop a high-performing development team focused on collaboration, accountability, and continuous improvement.
- Foster cross-departmental collaboration to identify fundable opportunities and strengthen programmatic alignment with donor priorities.
- Employ a servant-leadership approach to support staff success, retention, and professional growth.



Goals and Objectives

Rodale Institute is now operating at a larger scale and with broader influence than at any point in its history. The organization has expanded its research, consulting, and education programs while increasing demand for its expertise across agriculture, healthcare, the corporate sector, and the public sector.

The Institute now supports farmers transitioning significant acreage to organic production, partners with major companies and federal programs, and reaches a growing national and global audience through its programs and platforms.

The next Chief Development Officer will translate this growth into a more structured, scalable development function, ensuring the organization has the resources needed to meet increasing demand and execute its strategic priorities.

Build and Diversify Philanthropic Revenue

Expand and diversify revenue across individual, institutional, and corporate sources. Strengthen principal and major gift programs while building a broader pipeline of aligned donors.

Lead a Comprehensive Campaign

Design and execute a campaign aligned with organizational growth priorities, including research expansion, regional centers, and farmer training. Clearly link funding opportunities to measurable outcomes.

Strengthen Development Operations

Build a more disciplined, data-driven development function. Improve systems, reporting, and forecasting to support decision-making and scale.

Expand External Engagement

Leverage the Institute's growing visibility and cross-sector partnerships to increase philanthropic support. Ensure consistent, clear communication of impact to donors and partners.

Build and Lead a High-Performing Team

Develop a team structure aligned with current and future needs. Establish clear goals, accountability, and performance standards.

Align Fundraising with Long-Term Strategy

Ensure development strategy supports both near-term revenue goals and long-term organizational growth. Maintain focus on sustainability, not just short-term gains.



Candidate Qualifications

Education

A bachelor's degree or an equivalent combination of education and relevant experience is preferred.

Required Experience and Expertise

The ideal candidate will bring a strong track record of leadership, fundraising success, and organizational impact within mission-driven environments.

They will demonstrate:

- A minimum of **10 years of progressive leadership** experience in revenue generation, nonprofit or for-profit management, and financial oversight, ideally within a complex, mission-driven organization
- Demonstrated success in **securing major and principal gifts**, including personally cultivating and soliciting transformational, multi-year commitments
- Executive-level **financial acumen**, with experience in budgeting, forecasting, analysis, and strategic decision-making
- Experience working closely with a **Board of Directors**, with the ability to build strong relationships and support board engagement in fundraising
- Proven ability to lead, develop, and inspire **high-performing teams**, with a focus on accountability, collaboration, and results
- Strong **organizational and management skills**, including planning, prioritization, delegation, and program execution
- Excellent **written and verbal communication skills**, with the ability to engage and influence a wide range of stakeholders



Leadership Skills and Competencies

The successful candidate will bring a combination of strategic leadership, operational execution, and relationship-building capability.

Fundraising Leadership

Extensive experience leading comprehensive fundraising strategies, including major and principal gifts, donor engagement, and revenue growth initiatives. Demonstrated ability to strengthen development operations, expand donor bases, and increase funding levels over time. Experience shaping multi-year fundraising strategies and campaigns is preferred.

Mission Alignment and Attributes

A deep commitment to mission-driven work, with strong alignment to organizational vision and values. Brings energy, integrity, curiosity, and a relationship-oriented mindset.

Leadership and Team Management

Experienced in building, mentoring, and leading high-performing teams in a collaborative and

accountable environment. Bring a transparent, inclusive, and team-oriented leadership style.

Strategic and Operational Leadership

Demonstrated ability to balance long-term strategic thinking with day-to-day execution. Brings strong decision-making skills that incorporate data, stakeholder input, and organizational priorities to drive results.

Communication and Relationship Building

An exceptional communicator with the ability to build trust, engage diverse audiences, and inspire support among donors, board members, and internal stakeholders. Skilled at cultivating meaningful relationships and aligning stakeholders around shared goals

Work Requirements

This position is based in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, with an expectation of on-site presence at least two days per week to support collaboration and engagement.

The role also requires the ability to travel nationally as needed for donor meetings, events, and organizational activities.



The Community

Kutztown, Pennsylvania



Kutztown, Pennsylvania, offers a unique combination of rural character, natural beauty, and accessibility to major metropolitan areas. Located in Berks County, the region is known for its rolling farmland, strong agricultural heritage, and close-knit community environment.

Rodale Institute's campus sits on 450 acres and serves as both a working farm and a center for research, education, and innovation. The setting provides a distinctive and mission-aligned environment, offering a direct connection to the land and agricultural systems that define the Institute's work.

Kutztown is conveniently located near the cities of Reading and Allentown and within driving distance of Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. Residents benefit from a peaceful, rural setting while maintaining access to major economic and cultural centers.

The area appeals to individuals and families seeking a balance of professional impact and quality of life, with access to outdoor recreation, local events, and a strong sense of community.

Lehigh Valley International Airport is approximately 25 minutes from campus, providing convenient access for regional and national travel.

Procedure for Candidacy



All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include, as separate documents, a CV/resume and a letter of interest. Review of applications has begun and will continue until the position is filled.

Please direct all nominations and applications to Ashley Buderus, Michelle Johnson, and Jess Cummings through the WittKieffer Candidate Portal by [clicking here](#) or through the office of Jess Cummings at jcumings@wittkieffer.com.

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